

OUR YOUNG FOLKS.

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DOING HIS BEST.

CHAPTER VII.

MASTER DINKS TAKES A HAND.



IRST, Lon tackled Jack. To save himself from falling, Jack clutched Lon by the collar.

Lon, lifting Jack's leg, at the same time butted his head into Jack's stomach. Jack responded by bearing heavily down on Lon, with one arm clasped under his breast and the other tightening across his throat.

Lon bit Jack's arm, the furious teeth finding flesh through coat and shirt-sleeve. Jack thereupon entangled four or five fingers in Lon's hair, took a twist or two, and bereft the parent scalp of a handful.

Howls from Lon. "Let go, then!" from Jack.

The thing was growing serious. Phin came out from behind the door, and with pale and excited features looked wildly upon the combat he had caused. The girls shrieked; the boys prompted and cheered.

"Now's your chance, Jack!" "Throw him over your shoulder, Lon!" "Hands off! fair play!"

"Stop them! stop them! Jack will get hurt!" cried a piercing voice. "O, don't let them fight any more!"

It was the voice of Phin's little sister Kate, who ran back into the schoolroom, shrieking with fear and distress.

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Y O U N G A B E.

IN the winter of 1818 the good people of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, were one day surprised by the reappearance of a man who had left that part of the country some time before; and the rumor flew rapidly from mouth to mouth, "Tom Linkhorn has come back!"

He was a man of medium height, tremendously thick-set, muscular, round-faced, and jolly. He was known in that part of the country as a shiftless fellow, fond of a joke or story, and formidable in a fight, but too lazy to get a decent living and provide for his family. He likewise enjoyed an unenviable notoriety as "the man that bit off Abe Enlow's nose." Enlow was a bully of the district, who, happening to rouse the wrath of the lazy and good-natured Tom, had found his match in him, and lost at once his reputation as a fighter and the important feature above mentioned.

The bad fame of this exploit, together with his "bad luck" generally (lazy folks are always having "bad luck"), had induced "Tom Linkhorn" to emigrate to Indiana two years before. He had taken his household goods down Salt River on a flatboat (which, with his usual ill luck, he upset on the Ohio, spilling everything into the water), and had afterwards come back for his wife and two children, packed them upon two horses, together with what was left of his worldly possessions, and disappeared in the wilderness, out of which he now reappeared alone.

His old neighbors, seeing him pass, were inclined to stop him, hear his stories, and "swap jokes" with him. But Tom had come back on "business." He walked straight to the little log-cabin of the Widow Johnston, whom he had courted before his marriage, but who had rejected him, to make a better match. Her husband had since died, and she was the mother of three fatherless children. No doubt she was glad to see an old friend, though I should think the "business" he had come on must have surprised her a little. His wife had lately died, and he had two children who were motherless.

"You see, Mis' Johnston," he said, "I have no wife, you have no husband. I've come a purpose to marry you. I've knowed you from a gal; you've knowed me from a boy. I've no time to lose; and, if you're willin', let it be straight off."

"Tommy, I know you well," was the reply, "and I have no objection"; — Tommy having given color to his proposal by a glowing account of his present worldly prospects.

The marriage took place the next morning, and the late Mrs. Johnston and her three children set out at once with her new husband for his home in Indiana. Great must have been her disappointment and chagrin on seeing what sort of a home that really was. It was in the depth of winter; and the house — a log-cabin of the roughest description — was surrounded by woods. Its floor was the bare ground. It had neither window nor door, — an opening in one side, which was never closed, answering in place of both.

Rude three-legged stools were the only apology for chairs. Poles stuck in the cracks of the logs in one corner of the cabin, and supported at the other end on crotched sticks sunk in the earthen floor, served as a bedstead. A quantity of leaves, old clothing, and skins, spread on boards, which rested on the poles, answered for a bed. The table was a broad slab, in the four corners of which holes had been bored for the hewed legs.

This one room served as bedroom, kitchen, and parlor. There was a loft above, for the children, who climbed up to it on a row of pegs driven into the logs, — like the rounds of a ladder with only one side-support. The scanty furniture of the hut was in keeping with everything else about it. It was the home of shiftlessness and poverty, where the new-comers had looked to see at least decency and comfort.

Many women, in the place of the second Mrs. Linkhorn, would have turned about and gone back with their children to the comfortable Kentucky cabin, leaving lazy Tom and *his* children to their miserable lot. But pity for the two little ones, Abe and Nancy Linkhorn, if not a sense of duty to their father, inspired the heart of the late Mrs. Johnston with a noble resolution. She determined to stay, and make the best of a bad bargain. The furniture she had brought with her, though that of a poor Kentucky widow, seemed truly luxurious in Tom's floorless and windowless abode ; and she immediately set to work improving the condition of the family.

She made Tom — who was a sort of carpenter, if you will believe it — put down a floor, hang a door, and fit a window. At the same time she clothed little Abe and Nancy in some of the garments of her own children, and made them comfortable at night in warm beds, such as they had never known till then. Before, they were dirty, ragged, shivering, and neglected ; now, a door kept out the winter winds, while a bright fire blazed in the cabin, and, better still, they had a warm home in the new mother's great and loving heart. In short, she made human beings of them, who had seemed little better than savages before.

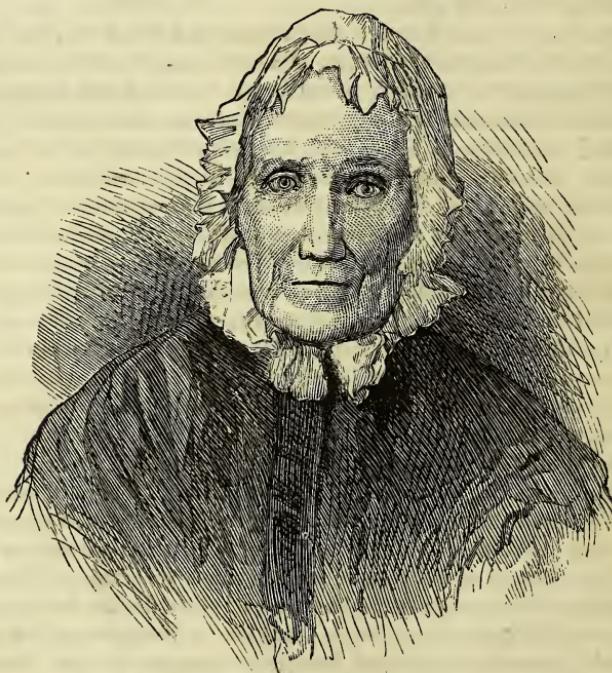
Of the two Linkhorn children, Abe was the younger. He was then nine years old, — having been born on Nolin Creek, near Elizabethtown, in Kentucky, in the year 1809. His mother's maiden name was Nancy Hanks ; she was tall, dark, and slender, and probably an excellent woman in her way, though unequal to the task of making much of a man of Tom Linkhorn. Dying there on the rude bedstead of poles, in the Indiana wilderness, she had left her orphans to be cared for by this stronger and nobler, if not better woman, who in that humble sphere was to have the making of a great man in American history.

Tom Linkhorn — or Linkhern, as the name was called in Indiana — could neither read nor write, until his first wife, Abe's mother, taught him to sign his name. He had always made "his X mark" before. It does not appear that his literary accomplishments went any farther than this ; and, having himself lived in ignorance all his life, he saw no necessity for educating his children. Their new mother thought differently ; and in the new order of things Abe and Nancy were, before long, sent to school. She took a great

liking to Abe, who returned her affection with all the ardor of a heart hungry for love. In after years, whenever he spoke of his "saintly mother," and his "angel of a mother,"—as he often did,—he always meant, not her who gave him birth, but this woman, to whom he owed all that made life of any value. She herself, later in life, could not speak of him without tears.

Her own son, she said, was a good boy, but Abe was kinder, better, truer. "Abe," she averred, "never gave me a cross word or look, and never refused to do anything I asked him. I never gave him a cross word in my life. His mind and mine — what little I had — seemed to run together. He was dutiful to me always, and I think he loved me truly."

This relation between mother and son, in that lonely log-cabin, was very beautiful. Our readers will, no doubt, be glad to see the portrait of this excellent woman, and we give it here.



Little Abe's Second Mother.

The school to which the children went was in a little log school-house a mile and a half away. It had no windows,—only holes cut through the logs, in which "greased paper took the place of glass." The roof was just high enough for a man to stand under it without hitting his head. Here Abe learned to read, write, and cipher. Young as he was, however, he had to help his father so much of the time that only a few weeks in the year

were left for school; and his biographer tells us that "all his school-days added together would not make a single year."

In personal appearance Abe was ludicrously tall and lank, and sallow-skinned. His body was thin and wiry, his legs and arms were prodigiously long, feet and hands large, and all his movements awkward and ungainly. He wore a 'coon-skin cap and buckskin trousers. As buckskin, when it has been wet, will shrink, and as Abe was out in all sorts of weather, his buckskins clung tight to his long legs; moreover, as he was all the while growing taller, while they were growing shorter, several inches of bare shin, thin and blue, was exposed between the ends of his trousers and the tops of his shoes.

At fifteen he went to school to a man who taught "manners"; and it must have been a funny sight to see tall and gawky Abe brought in by a companion, taken around the school-room, and formally "introduced" to the grinning boys and girls.

At seventeen he had reached the amazing height of six feet and four inches. He had long since left school and begun to get his living in the world by hard work. When not employed at home, he was hired out to the neighbors, who paid over to the father the boy's scanty wages.

But Abe had had a taste of knowledge which would not let him rest in ignorance. His father had not taught him to like hard work; but he did love a book, and, wherever he was, at every chance he could get he was reading or studying. In the winter evenings he sat in the chimney-corner, and ciphered on the wooden fire-shovel, by the light of the blazing logs. When the shovel was covered with figures, he would shave them off with his father's "drawing-knife," and begin again.

"He read every book he could lay hands on," says his step-mother; "and, when he came across a passage that struck him, he would write it down on boards, if he had no paper, and keep it there until he did get paper. Then he would look at it, rewrite it, and repeat it. He had a copy-book in which he put down all things, and thus preserved them."

He borrowed books of everybody who had them to lend. Once he borrowed Weems's "Life of Washington" of a neighbor named Crawford, and kept it on a shelf made of a clapboard laid on two wooden pins. "But just behind the shelf there was a great crack between the logs of the wall; and one night, while Abe was dreaming in the loft, a storm came up, and the rain, blowing through the opening, soaked his precious book from cover to cover." Crawford compelled the poor boy to pay for the damaged volume, which he did by "pulling fodder" for him at twenty-five cents a day, — a meanness for which Abe took an amusing revenge by composing ballads and jokes about a dreadfully misshapen nose which Crawford had the misfortune to carry, and which he could not show afterwards at any public gathering without exciting laughter.

Abe was distinguished for his good-nature, his love of jokes and stories, and his benevolent heart. He was always ready to help others. Here is a little anecdote of his school-days which brings him vividly before us. One

day the schoolmaster had put out the word *defied* to a large class of boys and girls, all of whom had missed it. "D-e-f-i-d-e," "d-e-f-y-d-e," "d-e-f-y-d," — it was spelled in all sorts of ways except the right one, until the master, in a terrible rage, told the class they should stay in their places day and night until *defied* was spelled correctly. The rest of the school were dismissed. One little girl had got it "d-e-f-y-e-d," when, chancing to glance at Abe at the window, waiting to help his mates out of their trouble, she saw him put his finger to his *eye*. With that hint she spelled the word, and the class was let out.

Abe delighted in composition, and while at school he began to write essays against cruelty to animals. He was pained by the conduct of the boys, who were in the habit of catching terrapins and putting coals of fire on their backs. "He would chide us," says one, "tell us it was wrong, and write against it."

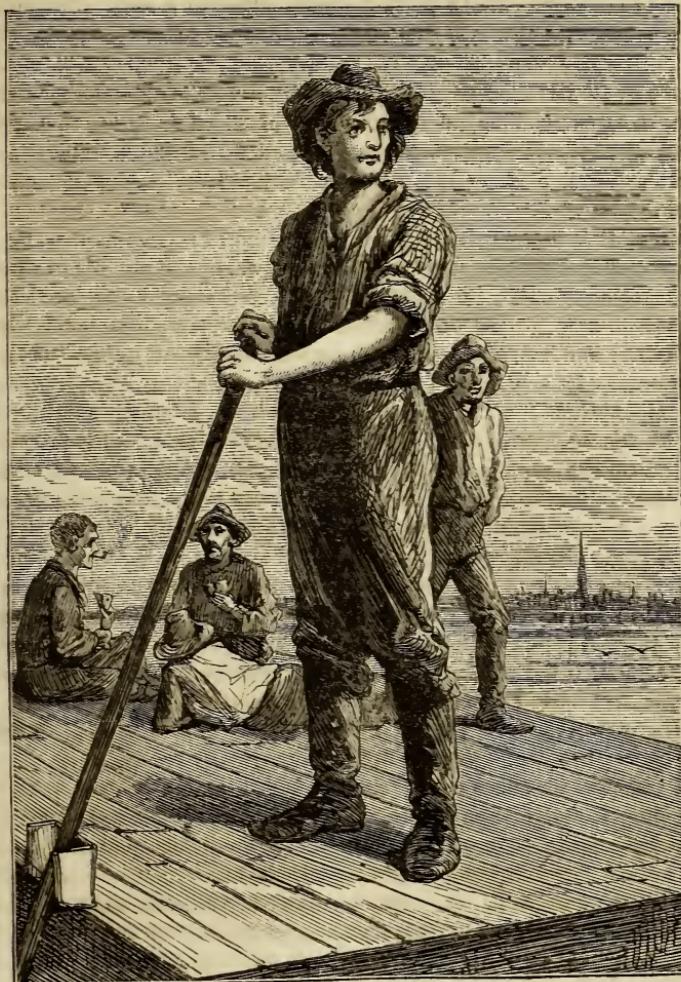
He early showed his talent for public speaking. When he was fifteen, he began to preach little sermons to the children, taking a text, and reading a hymn. One day his step-brother, John Johnston, threw a terrapin against a tree, and crushed its shell. Abe saw its sufferings, and preached upon the spot a sermon against cruelty, "contending that the life of an ant is as sweet to it as ours is to us."

Old "Tom Linkhern" did not believe in Abe's spending his time in this way, and treated him so badly that the boy preferred "hiring out" to the neighbors to working with his father at home. All considered it a great treat to have "Abe Linkhern" come and work for them, he was so good-humored, so obliging, and so full of entertaining stories. He was prodigiously strong also, could throw the best man at wrestling, and do a bigger day's work, when he set out, than anybody.

Some of his feats of strength, vouched for by his old neighbors, are almost incredible. He could carry a load sufficient for three ordinary men. One day he was seen to pick up a chicken-house, which must have weighed not less than six hundred pounds, and quietly walk away with it. At another time, seeing some men, who were building a corn-crib, preparing levers upon which to raise and carry some huge posts, he shouldered the posts one after another, without help, and bore them to the place where they were wanted.

Game was plenty in that region, — deer, squirrels, wild fowl, — but Abe seems to have loved a book better than a gun.

The people of the neighborhood were generally rude and uncultivated, many of them belonging, like the "Linkherns," to the class of poor whites of the South. A dish of pared potatoes passed around among company, to be eaten raw, like apples, was considered a treat. The belief in witches was common. "If a dog ran across a man's path while he was hunting, it was regarded as a sign of terrible luck, unless he instantly hooked his two little fingers together, and pulled with all his might until the dog was out of sight. If a horse breathed on a child, it would have the whooping-cough. Everything must be done at certain times and seasons, else it



Abe, the Flatboat-man.

would be attended with bad luck. Trees must be cut for rails in the early part of the day, and the fence must be made in the 'light of the moon,' or it would sink. Potatoes must be planted in the 'dark of the moon,' but trees and plants which bear their fruit aboveground must be put out in the 'light of the moon.' Soap must be made in the 'light of the moon,' and stirred only one way, and by one person."

Such were the people among whom Abe was brought up; and the wonder is, not that he showed some of their coarse and peculiar traits, in after years, but that, emerging from such surroundings, he should ever have arrived at distinction.

In his seventeenth year he worked nine months for a man, at the mouth of Anderson's Creek, for six dollars a month. He managed a ferry-boat which plied across the creek and the Ohio River; did farm-work and chores about the house; ground corn in a hand-mill; built the kitchen fires in the morning before the folks were up; turned his hand, in short, to anything required of him, and usually read and studied till midnight. Owing to his tremendous strength, he was an invaluable hand at hog-killing and rail-splitting.

Beautiful as was the relation between Abe and his step-mother, he and old Tom never got along well together; and when Abe was nineteen years old he resolved to strike out for himself, and see the world. He accordingly got a situation as a hand on a flatboat, going to New Orleans. He was a "bow-hand," and his business was to work the "front oars." This was the beginning of a new life to him, but it came near having a tragical end.

One night when the boat was laid up against the shore, a little below Baton Rouge, he and his companion, who were fast asleep in the little cabin built on the stern, were startled by the sound of footsteps on board. "They knew instantly that a gang of negroes had come to rob, perhaps to murder them." His companion, thinking to frighten them away, shouted, "Bring the gun, Abe! Shoot 'em!" Abe brought no gun, but, rushing out, fell upon the negroes with a bludgeon, fought them furiously, drove them off, and then, casting loose the flatboat, escaped down the river. In this combat Abe received a scar which he carried all his life.

But Abe was not yet of age,—his father still had a claim upon him,—and he did not leave home "for good," and begin life for himself, until two years later. This was in 1830, and he was then twenty-one. The family had in the mean while moved to Illinois, and settled on the north fork of the Sangammon, ten miles west of Decatur.

Abe, then, having broken up fifteen acres of land for his father, and split rails enough to fence it, took an affectionate leave of his good step-mother, whom he never saw again except at intervals, but whom he never forgot. His father died not long after,—his sister had died before,—and his mother was left poor. Abe sent her money as soon as he had any to send, and continued to do so all his life. He wrote to her, and visited her whenever he could; his last visit being paid to her after he had become the most famous man, at that time, in the world.

Abe worked about at "odd jobs" until he received what was considered by him a splendid offer of fifty cents a day, and twenty dollars at the end of the trip, for going once more with a flatboat to New Orleans. He was to start from a point near Springfield; but on arriving there with two companions, who were to make the voyage with him, they found that the flatboat was not yet built! Abe thought they could build one; and, procuring an axe, walked into the woods, and began to slash away at the big trees. The timber was quickly got ready, and rafted down to Sangammon town, where it was sawed, and the boat finally built.

While they were at Sangammon town, a juggler gave an exhibition in the

village. He called for a hat in which to perform his feat of cooking eggs. No hat was forthcoming. At last a long, lank, gawky fellow in the audience handed up a broad-brimmed, shabby felt hat, with the humorous remark, "Mister, the reason I did n't give it you before was out of respect for your eggs, not care for my hat."

The dry way in which this was spoken "brought down the house." The speaker was Abe.

As soon as the flatboat was finished, it was brought down to the landing, loaded with corn, hogs, pork in barrels, etc., and started on its trading expedition down the river. It must have been a happy time for Abe. He was his own man now; the world was before him; he was "full of joke and jest," and he had jolly companions.

They had not gone far, however, when they came very near losing both boat and cargo. She stuck on a dam in the river, the forepart projecting over it several yards, the hind-part settling down and filling, and the lading all sliding back. Nothing but Abe's presence of mind and ingenuity saved them from utter wreck. He rigged up a machine for tilting the boat forwards,—having first bored a hole in the bottom which projected beyond the dam, for letting the water run out,—and afterwards lifted her over.

This, and other experiences as a flatboat-man, led to the invention of an "improved method of lifting vessels over shoals." It was patented, and a rude model—evidently whittled out with the young flatboat-man's jack-knife—may still be seen at the Patent Office in Washington. The name of the inventor, written upon the bow in a bold hand, is "Abraham Lincoln";—for Abe, as we should have said before, had long since reformed the corrupt spelling of the family name, "Linkhorn" and "Linkhern" really standing for that which he was afterwards to make illustrious.

We have now, following his biographer,* sketched the boyhood and youth of this remarkable man,—which was all we set out to do,—and here we must leave him. How he continued to improve his mind at every opportunity; kept a grocery at New Salem; surveyed land; wrote deeds and contracts for his neighbors; read law, sitting astride a wood-pile, or lying on his back on the grass "with his long legs up a tree," to the astonishment of his acquaintances; went into politics, and, becoming the most popular man in Illinois, as well as the readiest speech-maker, was sent to Congress, and afterwards elected President of the United States; how he guided the Vessel of State over perilous obstacles, of which the young flatboat-man never dreamed; and how, at the close of our great civil war, he became a martyr,—all this we pass over; nor do we think it necessary for us to point out the moral which every intelligent boy will draw from this sketch of the great man's early years.

Augustus Holmes.

* The Life of Abraham Lincoln, from his Birth to his Inauguration as President. By Ward H. Lamon. With illustrations. J. R. Osgood & Co. One of the most remarkable biographies ever written, by which the obscurely born son of "Tom Linkhorn" is rendered the best-known public character of modern times. We are indebted to it throughout for the facts here related of the life of Young Abe.

